Island Paradise...Lost?

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Body

The United Nations Regional Information Center for Western Europe issued the following information:

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are experiencing an exodus. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, instability and an uncertain economic climate are combining to drive the populations to more stable lands. This illustrates the inextricable link between climate, migration and development. Sea rise threatens the ancient cultures and people of these islands.

2014 is the Year of Small Island Developing States, giving the global community a unique opportunity to capitalize on a number of high-level international processes on migration and development. "We live in an era of unprecedented, mass migration," said IOM's Director General, William Lacy Swing. "This is inevitable due to demographics and other factors such as climate change. Migration is also necessary for development and growth, and desirable if well-governed, particularly in Small Island Developing States who suffer more than most from brain drains."

Cities emit the majority of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), nearly three quarters, while SIDS emit less than one percent of total GHG emissions. Yet, SIDS leaders are taking the lead in seeking a new climate agreement in 2015. Many are to the forefront in disaster preparedness and prevention or are involved in innovative approaches on renewable energy.

The rise of sea levels threatens some SIDS with physical disappearance. New homes elsewhere will have to be found for the affected populations, which poses a unique challenge to the global community. The island of Kiribati has already purchased agricultural land in Fiji, and more governments will be thinking along similar lines.

Small-scale cross-border relocations have already taken place, and it is feared that permanent relocation, if not planned and managed, might lead to the disappearance of unique cultures and traditions, including the loss of cultural identity among inhabitants.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) aligns itself with the thinking of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in favouring early proactive planning, as resettling entire communities might prove to be socially, culturally and economically disruptive.

Noting that this year will see the re-emergence of the ocean-warming El Nino effect, IOM draws attention to IPCC's 5th Assessment Report's finding that climate change over the 21st century has increased displacement of people and that the risk of displacement increases "when populations that lack the resources for planned migration experience higher exposure to extreme weather events, in both rural and urban areas, particularly in developing countries with low income."

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